

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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INFO AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
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S E C R E T HONG KONG 5935

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PEPR, CH, HK
SUBJ: HONG KONG EFFORTS TO REDUCE NUMBER OF IMMIGRANTS
FROM CHINA

REF: A) HONG KONG 5625; B) HONG KONG 5713

SUMMARY: THE HONG KONG GOVERNMENT (HKG) HAS FORMALLY CONVEYED TO LOACL PRC REPRESENTATIVES ITS CONCERN OVER THE INCREASING NUMBER OF CHINESE LEGALLY ENTERING HONG KONG FROM CHINA. THE HKG BELIEVES THAT THE OVERCROWDED TERRITORY WOULD BE HARD PRESSED TO ABSORB THE LARGE NUMBER OF ARRIVALS AND UNLESS THE FLOW IS REDUCED BY CHINA, THE HKG WILL HAVE TO CONSIDER UNILATERAL RESTRICTIONS. REDUCTION IN THIS FLOW MAY ALSO SLOW DOWN THE RATE AT WHICH BENEFICIARIES OF PETITIONS FOR U.S. IMMIGRANT VISAS CAN LEAVE CHINA. THIS COULD LEAD RELATIVES IN THE U.S. TO PRESS THE U.S. GOVERNMENT TO SEEK AN EXCEPTION TO OR AN INCREASE IN THE DAILY "QUOTA". WE WILL CONTINUE TO MONITOR THE SITUATION CLOSELY. WE DON NO SEE ANY NEED FOR USG ACTION AT PRESENT. END SUMMARY.

1. THE HKG HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY CONCERNED IN RECENT MONTHS BY
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THE SHARP INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF CHINESE CITIZENS LEAVING CHINA AND ARRIVING HERE LEGALLY. WHILE APPROXIMATELY 4 PERCENT OF THE ARRIVALS HOLD DOCUMENTATION FOR ONWARD TRAVEL TO THIRD COUNTRIES (INCLUDING THE U.S.) AND ANOTHER 16 PERCENT HAVE AT LEAST SOME HIPE OF JOINING RELATIVES ABROAD, 80 PERCENT HAVE NO ONWARD DESTINATION IN SIGHT. THE HKG FEELS IT CAN ADEQUATELY COPE WITH THE HOUSING, EDUCATION AND

SOCIAL SERVICES NEEDS OF APPROXIMATELY FIFTY NEW ARRIVALS PER DAY. BY MID-APRIL, HOWEVER, THE FIGURE HAD REACHED 148 PER DAY, AROUSING SERIOUS CONCERN OVER THE BURDEN PLACED UPON HONG KONG'S FACILITIES.

2. THE HKG INFORMALLY RAISED THE PROBLEM WITH THE DIRECTOR OF NCNA, LI CHU-SHENG, ON APRIL 19. THEN ON MAY 8, AFTER CONSULTATION WITH LONDON, THE HKG CALLED IN THE NCNA DEPUTY DIRECTOR CHU YI (LI WAS OUT OF TOWN) TO CONVEY ITS CONCERN FORMALLY. THE HKG PROVIDED CHU WITH THE FIGURES FOR RECENT MONTHS AND REQUESTED CHINESE ASSISTANCE IN CURTAILING THE FLOW. ALTHOUGH THERE WERE NO THREATS, THE HKG MADE IT CLEAR THAT UNLESS THERE WAS A REDUCTION, IT WOULD HAVE TO CONSIDER UNILATERAL CONTROLS.(THE FORM OF SUCH CONTROLS AND THE NUMBER AT WHICH THEY WOULD BE INVOKED ARE STILL UNDER DISCUSSION WITHIN THE HKG). CHU AGREED TO INFORM PEKING OF THE HKG'S VIEWS, AND SUGGESTED THAT PERHAPS PEKING WAS NOT FULLY AWARE OF THE SIZE OF THE FLOW SINCE EXIT PERMITS ARE ISSUED BY LOCAL REPRESENTATION IS UNSUCCESSFUL, LONDON MIGHT TAKE IT UP WITH PEKING.

3. THE PROBLEM OF IMMIGRATION FROM CHINA HAS BEEN A CONSTANT, ONE FOR THE HKG SINCE 1949. BETWEEN MAY 1950/MARCH 1955, THE HKG INTRODUCED IMMIGRATION TO THOSE WITH TIES IN HONG KONG ON A BALANCING SYSTEM -- FOUR ALLOWED IN FOR EVERY FIVE THAT EMIGRATED ABROAD. IN 1955, HONG KONG ESTABLISHED A DAILY QUOTA OF FIFTY ALTHOUGH THE CHINESE OBJECTED TO THIS LIMITATION ON THEIR TRADITIONAL RIGHT OF ENTRY. THE QUOTA ARRANGEMENT LASTED UNTIL THE
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CULTURAL REVOLUTION IN 1967 -- EXCEPT FOR A FEW MONTHS IN 1962 WHEN THOUSANDS OF ILLEGAL ENTRANTS SWARMED ACROSS THE BORDER WITH AT LEAST THE TACIT ACQUIESCENCE OF PRC AUTHORITIES. THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION AND HONG KONG'S OWN SECURITY PROBLEMS FORCED A DRASTIC CURTAILMENT OF IMMIGRATION IN 1967. THROUGH THE EARLY 1970'S, HONG KONG AND PRC RESTRICTIONS LIMITED LEGAL ARRIVALS TO A FEW THOUSAND PER YEAR. IN 1973, POLITICAL RELAXATION IN CHINA AND EFFORTS BY THE PRC TO OVERCOME A SIX-YEAR BACKLOG OF EMIGRATION APPLICATIONS CAUSED A SHARP INCREASE TO 55,000 FOR THE YEAR. THE HKG'S THREAT TO IMPOSE VISA OR ENTRY PERMIT REQUIREMENTS PROMPTED THE PRC TO CUT BACK BUT NOT SUFFICIENTLY. DISCUSSIONS CONTINUED THROUGH 1974. THE PRC OFFERED TO CURTAIL THE FLOW IF THE HKG WOULD REPATRIATE "CRIMINALS" WHO ESCAPED TO HONG KONG. THE HKG REFUSED TO RETURN "CRIMINALS" UNLESS CHINA SUBMITTED FORMAL EVIDENCE THROUGH THE HONG KONG COURT SYSTEM, WHICH IT REFUSED TO DO. EVENTUALLY IN NOV 1974, THE HKG DECIDED TO AGREE, IN PRINCIPLE, TO REPATRIATE ALL ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS CAUGHT IN THE PROCESS OF ENTERING HONG KONG, BUT EMPHASIZED THAT THIS WOULD BE ON A CASE-BY-CASE BASIS. THE PRC IN TURN "TOOK NOTE" OF THE HKG CONCERN. THE NUMBERS DROPPED TO 25,000 IN 1975/AND TO 20,000 IN 1976, CLOSE TO THE ACCEPTABLE 18,500 (50 PER DAY) FIGURE.

4. THE LOW FIGURES LASTED UNTIL LATE 1977 WHEN THE NUMBERS INCREASED TO NEARLY 100 PER DAY. THE STEEP CLIMB TO 114 PER DAY IN MARCH AND 148 PER DAY IN APRIL PROMPTED THE RECENT HKG ACTION.

5. THE RISE IN EMIGRATION RATE FROM CHINA CAN BE ATTRIBUTED TO THE CURRENT RELAXATION OF THE DOMESTIC POLITICAL SITUATION AND TO CHINA'S NEWLY REFURBISHED UNITED FRONT AND OVERSEAS CHINESE POLICIES. THE LENGTHY BACKLOG OF APPLICATIONS FOR EMIGRATION ARE NOW BEING PROCESSED MORE EXPEDITIOUSLY AND WE ARE SEEING GREATER NUMBERS OF U.S. VISA PETITION BENEFICIARIES (REF B). HKG STATISTICS INDICATE THAT 80 PERCENT OF ALL 1975-1977 ARRIVALS WERE UNDER THE AGE OF 45 WITH 34 PERCENT UNDER 16. MOST ARE NATIVES OF KWANGTUNG PROVINCE (FARM WORKERS OR URBAN YOUTH) ALTHOUGH A SIZEABLE PERCENTAGE ARE FORMER OVERSEA CHINESE (PARTICULARLY FROM
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INDONESIA AND THE PHILIPPINES).

6. A RESTRICTION ON THE NUMBER OF IMMIGRANTS PERMITTED TO ENTER HONG KONG WOULD REDUCE THE RATE AT WHICH U.S. VISA PETITION BENEFICIARIES LEAVE CHINA, UNLESS THE PRC AUTHORITIES GIVE PREFERENCE TO SUCH PERSONS. IF THEIR RATE OF DEPARTURE IS SLOWED SIGNIFICANTLY, THIS WILL PROBABLY GENERATE PRESSURES ON THE USG FROM RELATIVES IN THE U.S. TO SEEK EXCEPTION TO OR AN INCREASE IN THE DAILY "QUOTA".

7. WE WILL CONTINUE TO MONITOR THE SITUATION CLOSELY. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THE HKG AND PRC WILL WORK OUT AN ARRANGEMENT PERMITTING PERSONS DOCUMENTED FOR TRAVEL TO DESTINATIONS BEYOND HONG KONG, INCLUDING THE BENEFICIARIES OF PETITIONS, TO CONTINUE TO COME OUT AT CLOSE TO THE CURRENT RATE, WITH THE CUTBACKS AFFECTING INSTEAD THOSE PERSONS WITH LITTLE PROSPECT OF GOING BEYOND HONG KONG. WE DO NOT SEE ANY NEED FOR USG ACTION AT PRESENT.
SHOESMITH

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